

Covenant

Am I Under Grace or Law

HT-102 Lesson 4 Text

The follow text is taken from the beginning of Chapter 2 in "Torah: Law or Grace?" by Rabbi Ralph Messer:

The church has taught that Judaism is a religion of law and works while Christianity is a religion of grace and faith. When Christians speak today about the Jewish or Hebrew roots of their faith, they often state that the Hebrew roots teaching is trying to put Christians "**under the Law.**"

The cornerstone of our faith is the Biblical truth that Salvation is by grace and NOT works! In fact, the Bible does not make an issue out of 'Law or Grace,' man made it that way. The Hebraic understanding of Torah and grace is much different from the popular Western understanding. As a Christian, you have no doubt heard multiple sermons contrasting the "Law of Judaism" with the "Grace of Christianity." Now think about that for a moment. If I say the "Law" of Judaism verses the "Grace" of Christianity, which sounds more appealing: Grace or Law?

The thought often presented is that in the Old Covenant the Jews were saved by the Law, which is bad, but in the New Testament, Jesus did away with the Law so that we are now saved by grace and faith – which is good. The clear teaching of this mindset is that there is **no Grace** and faith in the Old Covenant Law and **no Law** in the New Testament grace and faith. For centuries, law and works and grace and faith have been contrasted as if they are two opposing means of salvation.

In Romans Chapter 3, the Apostle Paul addresses the very question still being asked today: "Has the Torah been abolished?" Paul's answer leaves no room for doubt stating, "*Heaven forbid!*" Paul not only confirms the validity of the Torah for believers, he also says that as believers, we are supposed to confirm or fulfill the Torah.

"Therefore, we hold the view that a person comes to be considered righteous by God on the ground of trusting, which has nothing to do with legalistic observance of Torah commands. Or is God the God of the Jews only? Isn't he also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, He is indeed the God of the Gentiles, because, as you will admit, God is one. Therefore He will consider righteous the circumcised on the ground of trusting and the uncircumcised through that same trusting. Does it follow that we abolish Torah by trusting? Heaven forbid! On the contrary, we confirm Torah. (Romans 3:28-31 CJB)

Paul's clear teaching in the Book of Romans is that salvation is based solely on faith in Jesus (Yeshua), and not in the least based on works. However, Paul continues by challenging the mindset that the Torah has therefore been made void or somehow replaced by faith in Jesus. In fact much of Paul's ministry was devoted to teaching the proper understanding and application of the Torah to the Gentile believers in Yeshua!

In the first century, "Church" consisted predominantly of Jewish believers in Yeshua meeting together with the growing number of non-Jewish believers (referred to then as Gentiles). The majority of Jewish believers would have been taught the Torah from birth and therefore would have understood the "ritual application of law" which included:

- Circumcision
- Laws of Kashrut (Dietary Laws)
- The Sabbath

This ritual application of law defined the distinct identity of the Jewish people prior to the coming of the Messiah. The "Christians" of that time were the believing Gentiles who had come to know the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, through Jesus, and subsequently through His disciples' ministry. Although the term "Christian" would not be associated with the followers of Jesus for some time, the distinct cultural and historical difference between the Jewish and Gentile believers was already an issue. Even the term "Gentile" becomes problematic in understanding the relationship between the Torah and Christians today.

*"Remember that you, once **Gentiles** in the flesh – who are called **Uncircumcision** by what is called **Circumcision** made in the flesh by hands – that **at that time** you were without Christ, being **aliens** from the commonwealth of Israel and **strangers** from the Covenants of Promise, having **no Hope** and **without God** in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." (Ephesians 2:11-13, emphasis added)*

According to the Bible (Ephesians 2:12), before your salvation in Jesus you were:

1. Without Christ
2. An alien from the commonwealth of Israel
3. A stranger to the Covenants of Promise
4. Without hope
5. Without God

After your salvation in Yeshua (Ephesians 2:19) you are:

1. WITH Christ
2. NO LONGER a stranger and foreigner (Centile)
3. A CITIZEN of the Commonwealth of Israel

The term Centile is actually identifying believers by their former state – before salvation in Christ. A much better term for believers in Jesus who were not raised in the Torah and traditions of the Jewish people is “nations” or “Believing Nations.” This brings to light the challenge Paul and many others faced in the first century Church. Just how were the believing Jews to teach and apply the New Covenant – a covenant based on the Torah (Jeremiah 31; Hebrew 8) – to the believing Nations (former Centiles), who had little or no familiarity with the Torah and its 613 Principles? What relationship to the Torah did all believers, both Jew and Centile, have after they had received salvation in Yeshua (Jesus)?

When Paul exhorts believers regarding *“putting on the full counsel of the LORD”* (Acts 20:27), he is referring to the counsel and understanding found in the Torah. The early Church did not teach what we have been commonly taught in Christianity today. Believers in the first and second centuries were taught the Torah! After all, the New Covenant is not really a new walk; it is a re-newed walk of Torah, fulfilled by the righteousness and sinless life of our Jewish Lord, Yeshua, Jesus Christ!

As previously stated, the Bible of Jesus was the Torah. Jesus did not have a King James Version of the Bible. He didn't have the NIV, and He did not have the Living Bible. Jesus taught from the scroll of the Torah. This was life to Him, and it was life to the early Church witnesses of the Gospel, to the Apostles, to Paul, to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and to John.

So let me ask you a question: How did we get to the point today that we can view the Torah as an oppressive law, or as something negative? To the Jewish people the Torah is guidance, teaching, and instruction. The Commands in the Torah are given to teach and disciple you, to discipline your daily habits. Remember, you don't decide your future, you decide your habits, and your habits decide your future! Jewish people today continue to observe the instructions of the Torah. However, this is coupled with their belief and faith in God, and not replaced by it. The idea that God has somehow nullified the eternal Principles of His Word is a completely foreign concept to the Jewish mind.